1:Beals E-5 (1940-1941)1946 NU34 Tarasco NU34
[p.1126]

661 confidential talks, and even then it is doubtful whether all the details were abstracted from
579 unwilling witnesses. The story as learned does not seem to call for all the secrecy involved, and this gives weight to the suspicion that the truth of the underlying factors was not secured and that these factors are more operative today than anyone would admit.

At the height of the agrarian movement in Michoacán, the control of the *municipio* was secured by a group of some 30 men calling themselves "agrarians (*agraristas*)." Everyone seemed agreed that there was no genuine agrarian problem in Cherán and that the members of the group had no desire for land but only for power. Perpetuating themselves in office, members of this group at first were tolerated but gradually became more and more overbearing in their attitude. When people finally began to show signs of discontent, the "agrarians" asked the State authorities for aid on the grounds that the people were rebellious. As a result, a detachment of soldiers was stationed in Cherán under the command of a lieutenant to enforce order and the authority of the municipal officials. The young lieutenant apparently soon saw that his troops were perpetuating an illegal and unpopular group in power and tried to get his superiors to make a real investigation, but with no success. The tyranny of the ruling group now became unbearable.

The climax came when a drunken member of the group began firing his revolver on the main streets and threatening people. One of the soldiers endeavored to arrest the man and was shot and killed. The lieutenant now succeeded in having the situation thoroughly investigated, and as a result the detachment of soldiers was withdrawn. The following day occurred the *zafarrancho*. Some 10 to 12 of the "agrarians" were killed and the rest fled the town. In 1940, they were still living in exile in nearby towns.

664 For a time following this, Cherán was
665 governed by a *presidente militar*, an appointed
467 army officer. Technically, this was true in 1940, but the commander rarely even visited the town and all troops had been removed some time before. The present "progressive" government has effectively been in power since the affair. This is also the group which has

1:Beals E-5 (1940-1941)1946 NU34 Tarasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

organized the local branch of the CTM, no doubt a factor in securing the withdrawal of the always unpopular military garrison.

The leader of the progressive group is a man who has not held any official office in the town, Moisés Valenzuela, commander of the *reserva*. An orphan as a child, Valenzuela was aided by a woman he calls his aunt. According to Valenzuela's own story, he left Cherán at 16 and tried to go to the United States. Refused admission for some reason, he fell into bad company and became involved in smuggling liquor across the border during prohibition. Eventually the activities of the group extended to narcotics, Valenzuela was caught and held about 18 months in a Texas jail, after which he was deported. He then entered an army school, learned to read and write and received some further education, eventually becoming some sort of officer. Returning to Cherán during the time of the agrarians, he organized and led the resistance to them, and quite informally arrived in the position of being, as one informant put it, "head man" of Cherán. Locally he is regarded as an influential person over an area extending as far as the State capital, Morelia.

So far as evidence could be found, Valenzuela is an honest man, well-liked in the town. He talked several times of the necessity of going away and earning some money. According to his story, he did not mind giving most of his time for the town, but the time had come when he should look after his wife and children better than he was able to do in Cherán. Certainly he did not live in a pretentious house, and his customary clothing was overalls. His dress, of course, could be assumed for political reasons, but when he made trips to Morelia or Uruapan on community or private business, he certainly dressed little better. It is, of course, quite possible that persons with a different view of Valenzuela were afraid to talk freely. He himself deprecated his position and seemed somewhat amused that the townspeople accorded him as much respect as they did. His own story of his arrest and jail sentence in the United States was told with a somewhat rueful and artless good humor. On the many occasions he was seen with others, he always seemed ready to listen to other points of view and to advance his own without any attempt at domina-

208 66 stormy agrarian period (1921-26), when the agrarian hero was, by word of mouth, "touching the sensitive parts" of the Tarascan peasantry.

661 The second method, astute intrigue, follows fairly familiar Machiavellian lines but with a self-conscious sophistication and articulateness that would have delighted the immortal Florentine (Machiavelli, 1942). Intrigue has always been a major, time-consuming political activity in Durazno, and astuteness (astucia) is a personal quality much admired by the cunning leaders. It is true that politics is often infused by the characteristic desperation of peasants struggling for land with a newly activated lust for power; old agrarian fighters recall that after the land reform in 1924 they felt like the "recently arrived." But Durazno politics also has the character for its participants of a fascinating game to be played astutely, in accordance with certain rules and a high sense of art.

667 The third principal method, human organization, received great impetus during the twenties through the formation of regional committees and of "shock brigades," organized on Leninist principles. Leaders today conceive of their role as one of "organizing" and "controlling" the pueblo and the region. The cacique maintains a high threshhold of internal discipline, but the relations between the other leaders are horizontal, loose, and shifting. The importance of relations with higher organizations has already been described.

579 664 The fourth method, the "diagnostic trait" of violence, assumed the stature of a civil war during the agrarian period when indigenous patterns of blood vengeance and friendship loyalty combined with the ideological justifications of the reform struggle. During the twenty-year factional period from 1926 to 1948, Durazno and the region attained a unique notoriety in the state. Twenty-three cross-checked politically motivated homicides and several times more woundings and armed encounters took place in the three "bad years" from 1937 to 1939 alone. Leaders and ordinary citizens recognize violence as a normal aspect of politics, but today many are sick of it, and the incidence has greatly dropped. Assassinations are usually carried out by the more "valiant" members of a party and are generally directed against the minor figures of opposing parties. The number of active or potential peasant "fighters" in Durazno has always ranged between ten and forty and has been a significant power factor in region and state. The power basis of politics is a comparatively obvious factor here.

171 Much of what we have said here would apply to other [illegible] of caciquismo, including larger, non-Indian, conservative areas, such as Spain. In the Boasian spirit, however, we have limited our inductions to one Mexican Indian cacicazgo. In 1896 Franz Boas wrote: "When we have cleared up the history of a single culture . . . we can then investigate in how far the same causes were at work in the development of other cultures."

NOTES

114 1. Fourteen months of fieldwork were conducted between March, 1955, and July, 1956, under the auspices of the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the Mexican government.

2. Nonparticipants have illegally rented their plots, or are boycotting the cacique, or have withdrawn from politics from fear or weariness.

3. Leaders of opposition factions in the village stand ready to switch and offer a revolutionizing support to a leader who challenges a state or national machine. This automatic village-level support of an opposition leader partially explains the cataclysmic success of Lazaro Cardenas when, in 1934, he turned against national "strong man" Calles.